DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 873 FL 009 274

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TITLE Film Presentation Techniques.
INSTITUTION Alberta Teachers Association, Edmonton. Modern Language Council.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 9p.; Light type of this document may not reproduce clearly
JOURNAL CIT Alberta Modern Language Journal; v14 n3 p38-45 Spr 1976

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiovisual Aids; Cultural Education; *Foreign Language Films; *Instructional Films; Instructional Materials; Instructional Media; *Language Instruction; Language Styles; Language Usage; Learning Activities; Mass Media; Second Language Learning; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This article discusses three types of films and their use in the second language classroom. The description film is objective and static, and elicits adjectives and adverbs. This kind of film should be presented three times, each time followed by a different set of learning exercises. The culture film - characterized by descriptions, scenes from daily life, and value systems - is subjective in nature and uses nouns, verbs, modifiers, comparison structures, and the subjunctive mood. This type of film should be presented in its entirety and followed by discussion of the sociological elements communicated in the film. The action film uses language that students do not always understand. Therefore, it should be interrupted often for discussion and summary. These films are used most effectively in advanced classes. (AM)

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Film Presentation Techniques

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This article was originally presented by Dr. P. Monod to the 1975 Annual Conference of the Modern Language Council, held at Banff Springs Hotel in November. We are grateful to Dr. Monod for providing us with a copy of his paper.

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Movies are characterized by a balance among pictures, rhythm and sound used as channels for transmitting meaning. All these means are used simultaneously, and they enable the spectator to feel space, the passing of time, the evolution of ideas and emotions.

The film producer who wishes to convey a message directly perceived by the eye chooses the means which he considers will best serve his purposes. The spectator, on the other hand, looks at the sequence of pictures through his own frame of reference based on his experience.

The different types of moving pictures I shall mention are generally accompanied by language; as they are defined, we shall see which type of language, or which linguistic elements can best be internalized by using them; finally techniques of presentation best suited to each type will be suggested. The first category of film to be dealt with is the description film (static and objective).

THE DESCRIPTION FILM

This type of moving picture is the one which is closest to the still picture. It purports to be objective, to give a "true" representation of the world.

a) It is static in that movement is not used in all its affective possibilities;
b) It expresses one or more concepts in given situations;
c) It is composed of a sequence of descriptions which may simply be tied together by the movement of the camera, or of objects entering or moving out of the field. This type of movement enables the film maker to express the quality of the description: a rumbling torrent (close-up on the bubbling water jumping from rock to rock); the caress of the wind (wide angle on branches swaying gently on a blue sky background).

In our perspective, description is obtained by different types of camera movements. In order to use the descriptive film efficiently for the teaching of a second language, it is important to notice that the linguistic elements most often elicited are adjectives and adverbs. Obviously, verbs in the indicative mood will be used most frequently.

Having experienced the use of descriptive films, we would suggest the following steps:

a) The film is first shown in its entirety. This first viewing is followed by a series of questions on the pertinent elements of the film, that is to say, those which carry the meaning and enable the viewer to pass from one situation to the next. These questions should enable students to produce a general description. Although it may be superficial at this point, it encourages the acquisition of a basic lexicon within the framework of the necessary structures. These questions facilitate and develop a global understanding of the visual and linguistic elements composing the film. At the beginning, the students' visual understanding may be greater than their linguistic comprehension; the instructor must use the sequences of the pictures to develop linguistic understanding and expression.

We must be aware that, during the first seeing of the film, students may have different ways of grasping: (1) some will see and interpret the pictures correctly, although understanding hardly any language;

(2) others will interpret pictures and language equally well;

(3) a few others yet may understand the spoken language, while failing to perceive the pictorial message.

Questions in the beginning stage use basic lexical terms and basic structures.

b) The film is shown a second time.

After each sequence centered on one aspect of the description, the projector is stopped. The aim of this phase is to go more in depth into the descriptive aspect of the film. This is done by:

(1) using the students who know the language more than the others. They answer the questions. They offer their own descriptions. Here the instructor is no more that a conductor or better yet a resource person.

(2) using the students who see the pictures better, interpret their intended message better, but who experience difficulties in expressing

themselves, one gets them to put the questions on the vocabulary, or on special structures (example: why does one say "de hautes cheminées").

c) The film is shown a third time. This last projection will depend on the length, the difficulty and the interest of the film.

d) Students are then asked to give a more thorough description using the acquired lexicon and structures which demonstrate their perceptions of nuances. It is first produced orally in class with all students participating. At this point, it can be expected that more specific lexical terms have been acquired to better depict the situation.

e) From time to time, students are requested to write down their own descriptions. This, it is hoped, will serve as a type of reinforcement.

As we shall see, there are many similarities between the description film and the culture film.

THE CULTURE FILM

The culture film is characterized by:
(1) descriptions,
(2) scenes from daily life,
(3) and awareness of value systems.

Films dealing with culture are more subjective than description films. They involve the emotions of the artist producing the film; his attachment to his own culture is evident. The spectator, in turn, sees the film through the eyes of his own habits and sets of values.

In our terms, and for the purpose of this study, we consider culture to be alive: it is the outcome of diverse forces which influence the style of living of different peoples. These forces consist of: geography, traditions, historical and economic evolution.

The culture motion picture adds time and space dimensions to the still picture on a cultural theme. Movement and noise are definitely elements of life, so a film sequence on a market scene will have much more impact than a series of still pictures on the

same topic. The affective elements added by the film producer will be experienced by the viewer who will be caught more deeply by the culture movie than by the description film.

The type of language used will rely on the development of concepts dealing with movies, and the physical frame in which they take place. An example thereof would be to show how merchandise is displayed, where the market is located (in the middle of a place, of a square, of a street, or by a church). The different settings of these scenes can be the basis for the prompting of subjective reactions on the part of the students.

In other words, the language elements which are tied to this type of movie and which must be learned, either for recognition's sake or for the purpose of expression, are:

(a) specific nouns and verbs with their respective modifiers;

(b) structures enabling the formulation of comparisons (in time and space);

(c) locutions of appreciation, such as "il semble que ...," "il fut nécessaire que ...," "il fallut que ...," all of which entail the use of the subjunctive mood.

The culture film is shown first in its entirety, as in the description film. Starting from the visual elements, students are brought, through questions and answers, to express their feelings. In this exchange, the instructor is more than a conductor, however. He must lead the viewers to observe certain details, to detect a certain system of sociological factors and moral values which underlie the observed scenes. His questions must lead to pertinent extrapolations, trying to avoid usual stereotypes. For example, if a sequence of a film shows "Les Halles" at two o'clock in the morning, when unloading vegetables and meat takes place, students will be able to develop a sociological understanding of those people who eat "soupe à l'oignon" and drink wine at two o'clock in the night next to people who have come out of a ballroom or a theatre show.

The outstanding observations could be compared to similar situations in Alberta, and students could be led to discover the possible reasons for the differences

in types of markets and the differences in human rapports shown in the sequence and those with which they are familiar. Learning to understand a second culture relies on the accumulation of observed facts followed by carefully-thought-out extrapolations. This should lead students to grasp the differences and similarities between their own culture and that of the second language being learned. Students should become more and more aware that culture is a system and that it is made up, just as language, of many sub-systems.

The last type of motion picture which we shall study is the action film or film récit.

THE ACTION FILM or "FILM RECIT"

This type of film is action dominated. It is the one which makes the best use of the technical advantages of the motion picture. It may correspond to a short story or a novel; however, the tool for telling is essentially visual. It must be remembered that, although the film is the same for all those who look at it, each spectator may come up with a different set of interpretations.

The fact that the language accompanying the film is not necessarily understood makes the perception and comprehension of the pictures in sequence an essential basis for communication between the students and their instructor. So as to have a common point of departure, the instructor must make sure that there is a reasonable consensus in the interpretation of the motion picture.

The instructor should help his students to express their personal interpretations, all of which should be accepted before showing the next sequence or sub-sequence which may confirm or infirm, totally or partially, the formulated individual interpretations. From interpretation to interpretation, by confirmation or infirmation, former interpretations are accepted or rejected, but suspense is kept alive.

It cannot be over-emphasized that this type of motion picture lends itself beautifully to the use of various moods and tenses, without eliminating the role of the descriptive and emotional elements previously mentioned.

This type of film facilitates the looking back into the past, either at what might have happened before the film started, or at what happened in a previous sequence.

It is also possible and recommended to use it for inquiries into the future, either about what will happen after the film ends, or after a particular sequence.

In order to use the story film efficiently, it must be interrupted more or less frequently, either after sub-sequences or after sequences. The stopping of the film after selected sequences will lead the students to participate in feeling the suspense, in finding different alternatives to the resolution of the dilemma. This participation will be evidenced by summarizing what has happened so far in the viewer's eye and in forecasting future events.

I believe I have shown that using the film enables the learner to get a better working knowledge of the linguistic elements, of their functioning in structures. However, I doubt that films enable the student to acquire these linguistic elements from the beginning of his learning experience. This is why working with films belongs, at the earliest, after four years of French, for example, in Junior or Senior High schools.

Let me insist on the fact that films have an important role to play in the teaching of second languages. Films, and they alone, bring a reflection of real life to the classroom. They are movement and noises which resemble life as it is experienced outside of the school walls.

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From The L'Evangeline, Moncton, N.B.

Reproduced from *French III Times*, Newsletter of the French III Council of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association, Vol. VI, No. 2, November 1975.